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# *A Time of Harvest*

DRAWINGS AND PASTELS BY

*Sir George Clausen*

*R.A.*

*The Arts Council* 1949

# *A Time of Harvest*

## PASTELS AND DRAWINGS BY SIR GEORGE CLAUSEN, R.A.

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## FOREWORD

In arriving at a true understanding of most artists' work it is always of the greatest help to be able to see notes and sketches, the first impressions 'en plein air', from which derive the finished paintings we may later admire on the walls of a public gallery. The first reaction to a scene reveals in its intensity more of an artist's sensibility and personal flavour than can ever be discovered after consideration has developed the original theme and the first rapture has been lost in an elaboration of technique. This is true of all romantic artists, and particularly so of Clausen, working as he did throughout his very long life always a little apart from the main stream of painting, though never unaware of it and never unwilling to absorb the new ideas and movements in art around him.

Born in 1852, he worked from the age of sixteen in the drawing office of a firm of decorators in London until at twenty he won a national scholarship at South Kensington. Leighton and Millais were the models the students were expected to admire, but Clausen and a few others,

secretly rebellious, became increasingly aware of Whistler. From the school he was taken under the wing of Edwin Long, R.A., in whose studio he 'devilled' until the pictorial atmosphere of heavy Babylonian pillars, massive Egyptology and sultry slaves became too much, and after a trip to Holland and Belgium he studied in Paris in the studio of Bouguereau, an artist with whom, as with Long, he had again nothing in common.

From that time he came under the influence of Bastien-Lepage and, painting direct from nature, he began rapidly to develop the qualities we associate today with his work. The subjects he chose were simple: farm workers in the fields, the interior of barns, the scenes at harvest-time, the gentle countryside of Essex which has always inspired the finest of our native painters. His preoccupation was with light; the dazzle of sun on cornfields and haystacks and mowers at midday, the stilled radiance of blossom in orchards, the woods and empty fields at evening, and the subtle atmospheric effects in shadowy barn and stable. Corot influenced in spirit his early work while Manet and Degas can be traced in the technical approach to his painting, but he never allowed his sympathy with Impressionism and his passion for light to blind him to the necessity for form and design, and he seldom lapsed into the woolliness that, overtaking the later Monet and other French Impressionists, paved the way for the acceptance of Cézanne. His paintings of haystacks and cottages, of trees and fields, are never without firmness and the requisite recession, and his peasants moving about their work of ploughing and harvesting, observed with penetrating fidelity, are planted with an extraordinary power in the earth.

They are not paintings of figures in landscape or landscape with figures, but of landscape and figures and light and shadow inextricably woven into a satisfying entity of absolute poetic truth. Realism in fact has been carried to such a pitch of perfection that it achieves the universality which touches on our common experience and evokes the same nostalgia, the same feeling of indefinable regret and loss, as the summer music of Delius or the country writings of H. E. Bates. In common with them he may not show us anything very new, but what there is, in barn and tree and field, in the movement and grace of mowers and in his intuitive studies of children, is in essence revealed to us more clearly and tenderly than we may ever have seen it before.

It is inevitable, perhaps, living as he did as a young man in such an era, that a certain amount of sentimentality should permeate his work. The moral implications of Millet are obviously very strong, and any complicated materialist society contains the seeds of an emotional reaction in the manner of Rousseau. But his lively and inquiring mind and integrity of outlook prevented him from entertaining for long any attitude, however fashionable or prevalent, if it were not sound; and if his peasants are from time to time a little too idealised and, to take another aspect of his work, his nudes of young women a shade too stylised and cold to be true, at least he never approached within measurable distance of the standpoint of most of his contemporaries with their sweet sickliness of subject and their oily moral fervours. At the same time, once having established his way of painting, he did not close his eyes to the artistic movements of the day, and evidence of his

excellence is given in the way he remained always willing to learn from younger painters, to absorb new ideas and to adapt them to his purpose. This quality, and his sympathy in general with all things young and new, endeared him to succeeding generations of students in the London schools, and he was never looked upon as a fogey, a fate which befell most of the Royal Academicians and one which they richly deserved.

The paintings of his which are best known, because they are most readily available to the public, are 'The Girl at the Gate' and 'The Gleaners Returning', in the Tate Gallery, and 'Self Portrait', in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. He was made an A.R.A. in 1895, a member of the R.W.S. in 1898, an R.A. in 1908, and was knighted in 1927. For a time Professor of Painting at the Royal Academy Schools, he published two works—*Six Lectures on Painting* and *Aims and Ideals in Art*. He died in 1944 at the age of ninety-two, leaving behind him examples of oil paintings in most of the important Galleries in this country and the Dominions, and a mass of pastels, watercolours, notes and sketches for his larger paintings, never before seen by the general public, of which this Exhibition is a small selection.

J. WOOD PALMER

# *The Catalogue*

1 Summer Flowers 1925
Pastel. 9½ × 13½

2 Village Child in a Hat 1892
Pastel. 6½ × 9

3 The Rick Yard 1897
Pastel. 6¼ × 8¾

4 Study for 'The Man and the Boy' 1915
Pastel. 7½ × 9½

5 The Lane 1920
Pastel. 9½ × 13¾

6 Study for 'Gleaners' 1900
Pastel. 9½ × 13¼

7 Gathering Sheaves 1895
Pastel. 8½ × 14

8 The Blacksmith's Cottage, Duton Hill 1930
Pastel. 11¼ × 8¾

9 Building the Rick 1900
Pastel. 9¾ × 13

10 The Orchard 1890
Pastel. 6½ × 10

11 Study for 'Harvesters' 1896
Pastel. 12 × 7

12 Approaching Storm 1925
Pastel. 9¾ × 9¼

13 Study for 'Harvesters' 1896
Pastel. 14½ × 11½

14 Near Cookham Dean 1889
Pastel. 9¼ × 5¾

15 Bean Stacks 1892
Pastel. 9¼ × 7

16 Essex Farm 1900
Pastel. 8¾ × 6½

17 Study of Gleaners 1902
Pastel. 5 × 7

18 Farmhouse at Widdington 1892
Pastel. 9 × 7

19 Village Child 1900
Pastel. 6½ × 9

20 Farm Boy at Work 1903
Pastel. 8¾ × 11

21 Moonrise, Essex 1930
Water-colour. 8 × 8

22 Markwell's Farm, Widdington 1903
Water-colour. 9 × 8½

23 Filling Sacks 1895
Water-colour. 9¾ × 7¾

24 Study for 'Harvesters' 1896
Charcoal. 12 × 8¼

25 In the Stable 1910
Charcoal. 9 × 7

26 The Plough Team 1902
Charcoal. 9¼ × 7

27 Labourers Going Home — 1908
Pen and Wash. 9 × 13

28 The Wood — 1910
Ink, Charcoal, and Wash.
$9\frac{3}{4} \times 6\frac{3}{4}$

29 Study for 'Gleaners' — 1902
Charcoal. 9 × $11\frac{1}{2}$

30 The Hedger, Cookham Dean — 1890
Charcoal. $8\frac{3}{4} \times 13$

31 Study of a Gleaner — 1900
Chalk. $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11\frac{1}{2}$

32 Interior of a Barn — 1910
Charcoal. $10\frac{1}{2} \times 14$

33 Essex Village — 1925
Charcoal. 9 × $11\frac{1}{2}$

34 The Tired Mower — 1903
Charcoal. $10\frac{1}{2} \times 16\frac{1}{2}$

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